DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 351 122 PS 020 843

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TITLE Equity and Art.
PUB DATE Jan 91
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the National Conference of the Australian Early Childhood Association (19th, Adelaide, South Australia, August, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Art Activities; *Art Education; *Cognitive Development; *Curriculum Design; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Imagination; Preschool Education; *Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (South Australia); Bruner (Jerome S); Eisner (Elliot W); Goodman (Nelson); Greene (Maxine); Symbolic Thinking

ABSTRACT

In an effort to ensure that the arts receive equity with other areas of study, this paper presents an argument for the value of arts education in children's development. The argument is based on the work of four experts: (1) Nelson Goodman, who held that symbols are indispensable to communication, and that children's capacity for acquiring symbolization skills has implications for curriculum development; (2) Jerome Bruner, who examined modes of symbolic thinking, some of which are associated with the creation of art: (3) Maxine Greene, who provided a rationale for fostering children's use of imagination; and (4) Elliot Eisner, who maintained that the arts are cognitive activities. The argument is also based on neuropsychological research that indicates that verbal and mathematical thinking are associated with the left hemisphere of the brain, and that the right hemisphere is responsible for artistic endeavors. Art education develops the right hemisphere and provides a balance to traditional education, which is weighed in favor of the left. A 12-item bibliography is provided. (BC)

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EQUITY AND ART

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January 1991

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The idea of equity is not one that would usually be associated with art education. More usually it applies to social justice issues and facilitating access to educational opportunities. Mere access however, does not guarantee the quality of the curriculum that children experience or that it best meets all of their needs. More often it is a reflection of the prevailing political and community ethos. Decisions about national or state priorities in education are driven by the contemporary political and economic objectives for the country. In the present climate Australians are being urged to develop thinking and inventive skills to become the 'clever country' as opposed to the more hedonist view of ourselves as inheritors of the 'lucky country' depicted by author Donald Horne.

Thinking, in keeping with the economic view is coming to be regarded as a capital asset to be developed akin to exploiting mineral deposits. To this end the national newspaper runs a segment addressed to the topic of 'Investing in People'. As the economic imperative is causing society to consider reallocating its stocks and shares towards developing the bank of potential of our children, then we need to consider the effects of these future directions on those children who will be adults in the 21st Century. A recent South Australian Education Department curriculum statement considered the issue of whose needs should have priority of focus in the goals of an education system. They reasoned that 'education serves both the individual and the nation' (1990 p.2) and thereby lies a dilemma. Change in society and competing curriculum emphases must needs be reflected in the amount of time devoted to the curriculum components. As a reflection of the tremendous growth in technology and in preparation for the multi-function polis, one of the contemporary curriculum goals is to increase children's competencies in maths science and technology. Such a rebalancing is timely, but there are consequences that remain still to be explored.

My concern is that in meeting the expediency of changing contemporary priorities teachers may reduce time spent in traditional curriculum areas in a way that appears to fulfil the national priorities but which may short change children. One of the ways that I can see this happening is that the 'arts' areas are classified together as one of seven required areas of study. Yet the 'arts' conglomerate consists of at least 7 components of visual arts, craft, design, dance, drama, media studies and music. This clustering of the curriculum is likely to lead to over crowding and thus an either/or situation where teachers may substitute time spent on dramatising a story for more time consuming preparation of art materials on the grounds that the curriculum classification has been adequately 'covered'. In presenting the case for art in particular I am not indicating an expression of priority but rather using art as a case study for the inclusion of all of the arts in the curriculum. I regard these opportunities as necessary for those children whose future lies in technological industries as it is for those whose closest contact with arts may be as a consumer or a critic.

The connecting idea that forms the key to this approach is one which considers that all children should experience arts education because art of itself offers children entry to another mode of thinking and experiencing. In support of the notion of opening up children's access to imaginative modes of thinking Maxine Greene said '...to limit learners to a single dominant mode of interpreting their experience may be to frustrate their individual pursuits of meaning, and, consequently, their desires to come to know to learn. It may involve... the imposition of a predestined conception of the 'given' which these days is a largely technical rendering of the world' (1988 p.45). The predestined conception of the given may lead to the production of identical egg carton caterpillars with pipe cleaner legs and discouragement to individual children's ingenuity.

But at a deeper level of curriculum judgement the question is whether it is of more value to children to use their own imaginative ideas in symbolically expressing an idea by a means that they invent for themselves. The process of visualising, problem solving and talking about art may not produce immediate results, but it does provide children with options of alternative ways of representing experience. In evaluating our modes of teaching we need to give consideration to the deeper more hidden curriculum aims as well as to the immediate objective. As Maxine Greene says 'it is a question of opening subject matters as possible perspectives on the shared world, a question of releasing people for their own pursuits of meaning, their own searches for answers, their own efforts to name and to articulate what they live' (op.cit. p.52).

This question of 'opening subject matters' may apply equally well to drama, dance, movement, music. Here lies the crux of the equity of access issue for which the responsibilities most often lies in the hands of the individual teachers in the classroom. The teacher has the control of the allocation of time in the curriculum, the materials, and holds less visible yet potent attitudinal values which influence the outcomes for children in tangible ways. In the next section I will present some theoretical arguments in support of children experiencing a curriculum in which they are introduced to multiple modes of symbolisation. I will introduce the significant bases in theory with which to support the inclusion of art in the curriculum on the grounds of its contribution to children's ways of thinking. Establishing a grounding in theory said Schon (1983 p.273) is necessary because 'an overarching theory does not give a rule that can be applied to predict or control a particular event, but it supplies language from which to construct particular description and themes from which to develop particular interpretations'.

In support of art curriculum I am going to invoke the work of Nelson Goodman on symbolisation, of Bruner on modes of thinking, of Maxine Greene on the development of imagination, of Eisner on the arts as cognitive activities, and from the discipline of neuropsychology of evidence relating to the physical structure of the brain.

To support my arguments that the inclusion of arts education curriculum is an equity issue I begin with the work of Nelson Goodman and his approach to the theory of symbols (1969). Goodman held two important views: one of these was that 'symbols are indispensable to communication' (p.258) and the other theory related to the curriculum implications of the theory of symbols. In the acquisition of the symbolising capacities children needed practice to exploit their latent faculties. Beyond the basic urge Goodman considered the motivation for the 'use of symbols beyond immediate need is for the sake of understanding, not practice'. What compels is the urge to know, what delights is discovery, and communication is secondary to the apprehension and formulation of what is to be communicated' (p.258). For example, the 4 year old child who drew turtles in a picture took pleasure in discovering how lines drawn on paper could be used to represent the shell of the turtle that he knew from observation of the class aquarium. At 4 years he was old enough to have developed fluent verbal language but he chose the visual medium of line drawing as best suited to illustrate what he knew from his experience. He was not 'taught' to draw the turtle but provided with plenty of sheets of paper, felt pens, and given time to develop his turtle images, and appreciative adult companionship with whom to share his pride in his accomplishment. This task took time and repetitions to achieve this outcome.

The question of how children come to represent their experience was taken up by Jerome Bruner in Toward a Theory of Instruction (1966). He coined the terms Enactive, Iconic and Symbolic to designate the three systems of representation that the children develop. This can best be illustrated in the table by Hodgkin (1985 p.195) which portrays the main modes of representation in terms of curriculum for the first 8 years of education. It can be seen from the table that not one but two of Bruner's modes of symbolic thinking are associated with art-making activities. The Iconic mode of thinking is associated with imaginative drawing and painting as well as with graphs, diagrams and mapping skills. The Enactive modes of thinking are associated with crafts activities as well as with dance and games activities.

Whereas Bruner's framework provides a basis for the inclusion of all of the main modes of representation in the curriculum for schools, Maxine Greene provides a rationale for the fostering of the imaginative use of the symbol systems. If as a society we are concerned about the generation of ideas and innovations we need to consider how these aspects are to be addressed in curriculum. Maxine Green said (1988 p.45) 'In the recent proliferation of reports on education and calls for reform, there has been little or no mention of imagination'. Yet imagination and the ability to play with ideas seems to lie at the heart of an ethos that desires to promote innovation and foster new initiatives. Teachers have great power over children's future options by means of their influence on the young persons' disposition to explore ideas. Bruner expressed the possible options on the flow of ideas in terms of the closing off or opening up of subject matter. He said ' ... if the teacher wishes to close down the process of wondering by flat declarations of fixed factuality, he or she can do so.

The teacher can also open wide a topic of locution to speculation and negotiation'. Further, Bruner emphasised the potential of the child to be an art creator as well as a recipient or an audience for art culture. The child, said Bruner, 'becomes at once an agent of knowledge making as well as a recipient of knowledge transmission' (op.cit. p.127).

Greene speaks of the potential for imagination to open up new pathways. She described what happened when people are confronted with ambiguities in literature. She said 'opportunities are provided to see through the taken-for-granted, to disrupt the normal, to see reality anew' (op.cit. p.53). In the process of conjuring up our own mental resources to accommodate new ideas we release and develop our imaginative faculties. Greene reflected on the mechanisms necessary. 'The idea' she said 'is to offer opportunities to release imagination... to challenge awed passivity' (op.cit). By contrast our failure to open all the curriculum possibilities to children is that children will lose out. She said 'I recognise again how cheated we are and how subject to manipulation when no one helps us realise how many possibilities exist within our own experience living in the world' (op.cit. p.54).

Elliot Eisner is renowned as a curriculum theorist concerned with Aesthetic Education who is a strong exponent of the unique contribution that arts education confers. In 1986 he said 'the arts are cognitive activities, guided by human intelligence, that make unique forms of meaning possible' (p.57). This emphasis on the cognitive aspects served as a contrast to those who thought that the arts should be considered to be 'soft options' with influence that was limited to the affective domain.

It was Eisner who elucidated the pathway through which our sensory systems provide us with information about our surroundings in sensory forums such as through visual images or auditory patterns. We have the ability to play with images and to relate one image with another through recall – thus enlarging the potential of the experience. In this way the operation of our thinking impinges upon the everchanging pattern of images where our 'imagination often provides the springboard for expression' (1986, 60). The mode by which that imagination may be expressed is not necessarily a direct linear one for example a visual idea may be expressed as a rhythmic pattern or a bird represented by movement or song. Where the person has a wide range of possible options to choose from they have more opportunities to be able to express what they know. As Eisner said 'what we can convey in one form of representation has no literal equivalent in another' (1986 p. 64). This is further argument for the need for humans to 'develop multiple forms of literacy' (op.cit. p. 66).

The final theoretical position in support of the need for a balanced arts education comes from the evidence related to the physical structure of the brain and its relation to human intelligence. Traditional educational curricula are said to have been weighted in favour of verbal and mathematical thinking. The pedagogy of these areas of learning are associated with the left hemisphere of the brain which is the source of analytical and logical thinking. By contrast it is the 'right hemisphere that is primarily responsible for our orientation in space, artistic endeavour, crafts, body image, recognition of faces' (Gulbenkian p.25). Curriculum to develop these aspects of thinking have been considered of less significance in our culture. Edwards (1990) drew attention to the need for finding a balance in curriculum.

'People must find' he said 'a balance for integrating the functions of both the left brain and the right brain for maximum development of potential, the development of right brain functioning is a necessary and valued way of helping people to experience and discover their visual, symbolic, creative and intuitive ways of learning'. One of the paradoxes of arts education is that as a society we nurture evidence of talents of gifted children, yet often fail to recognise the rights of access to an education in the arts for all of the children.

CURRICULUM POLICIES

In the United Kingdom the arts represent one of 10 areas of the National Curriculum. The authors of 'The Arts in Schools' (1989) reported that during the period of intensive discussion about the school curriculum 'the arts, dance, drama, music, visual arts, literature' – were given 'little attention' (p. 3). The authors however were not prepared to concede that the arts are options. In South Australia in 1991 the arts represent 1 of 7 required areas of study in the newly released curriculum document titled 'Education for the 21st Century' (1990). Our challenge will still be to ensure that the spread of priorities does not restrict the arts to an either/or situation or to a token presence which does not give all children the opportunity to develop their enactive and iconic symbol systems and their imagination.

If children's education does not open up the full range of possibilities in modes of symbolic functioning we are not developing the full range of cognitive possibilities of a curriculum. We have seen the theoretical stances of Goodman about symbolisation, Bruner concerning modes of thinking, Greenes view of the development of imagination, and Eisner's view of the arts as cognitive activities.

The United Kingdom report provides further evidence from neuropsychology regarding the structure of the brain to support the provision of a balance of learning activities using different methods of symbolisation. All of these cases provide a rationale for the premise that Eisner makes for the development of 'multiple forms of literacy' (1986 p.66). It is not only an aesthetic value but an equity issue also. Failure to provide the full range of curriculum will not best serve in the best interests of either individual children or the nation.

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